

LCQ15: Providing support for non-local students

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (June 18):

Question:

In recent years, Hong Kong has spared no effort in building the "Study in Hong Kong" brand to develop Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education, and has been gradually enhancing support measures for non-local students while they are studying in Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of non-local students applying through different ways for studying full-time locally-accredited programmes in Hong Kong who have obtained bachelor's degrees or higher qualifications and those who have eventually been admitted, as well as the percentages of non-local students in the number of places of the relevant programmes, in each of the past three years;
- (2) given that full-time non-local undergraduate and postgraduate students were required to obtain a "No Objection Letter" (NOL(s)) issued by the Immigration Department before they were allowed to take up part-time jobs in Hong Kong in the past, of the number of non-local students who took up part-time jobs after obtaining NOLs in each of the past three years and, among them, the respective numbers of those who were pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate studies;
- (3) given that the Government temporarily exempted full-time non-local postgraduate and undergraduate students from the restrictions on taking up part-time jobs in November 2023 and November last year respectively (the temporary exemption arrangements), whether the authorities have compiled statistics afterwards on the number of non-local students who have taken up part-time jobs under the temporary exemption arrangements; if they have not compiled the statistics, whether they will collect the relevant data and review the effectiveness of such measure in future; whether they will consider regularising the temporary exemption arrangements in the long run;
- (4) as some non-local students have relayed to me that some local employers are deterred from employing non-local students to take up part-time jobs because they are not clear about the temporary exemption arrangements, how the authorities will publicise and promote the temporary exemption arrangements, and whether they have co-operated with the relevant tertiary institutions to provide non-local students with the relevant employment information and support services; and

(5) as it has been reported that the Chief Executive has indicated earlier that Hong Kong fully welcomes students who suffer from unfair treatment as a result of the policies of the United States to study in Hong Kong, and that he will do his best to provide the most appropriate support and assistance to students in collaboration with the local universities, of the work progress made by the authorities in supporting such students so far; whether they have set up task forces with various local universities to provide one-stop transfer services for such students, e.g. expediting their admission, transfer of credits, as well as urgent support measures such as providing accommodation arrangements, so as to attract more outstanding students to Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong has sound education infrastructure and our overall competitiveness in education ranked top five in the world. Among others, Hong Kong's post-secondary education is highly internationalised and diversified, and we boast five of the world's top 100 universities with outstanding talent in technology and research, making Hong Kong an international hub for exchange and collaboration among high-calibre talent. To fully leverage the distinctive advantages of the post-secondary education sector in Hong Kong under "one country, two systems", and to develop Hong Kong into an international post-secondary education hub, we strive to build the "Study in Hong Kong" brand and attract more non-local students to study and conduct research in Hong Kong.

After consultation with the Labour and Welfare Bureau, our consolidated replies to Hon Kenneth Leung's questions are as follows:

(1) In the 2022/23 to 2024/25 Academic Year (AY), the numbers of non-local students pursuing locally-accredited programmes at undergraduate level or above in Hong Kong, and the number of non-local students as a percentage of relevant undergraduate student places are tabulated below:

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Non-local student enrolment			
University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded programmes (Note 1)	21 656	23 051	26 609
Non-UGC-funded programmes (Note 2)	40 267	48 859	62 305
Total	61 923	71 910	88 914
Percentages of non-local students			
UGC-funded undergraduate programmes (Note 3)	19.2%	19.9%	23.2%

Non UGC-funded undergraduate programmes (Note 4)	7.0%	14.2%	18.7%
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(Note 1) Referring to full-time equivalent student enrolment, including both full-time and part-time programmes.

(Note 2) Non-UGC-funded programmes cover publicly-funded programmes offered by the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (HKAPA) and self-financing programmes offered by UGC-funded universities, the HKAPA, and other institutions. Relevant figures refer to the headcounts of full-time and part-time programmes.

(Note 3) Referring to non-local student enrolment as a percentage of local student places in UGC-funded undergraduate programmes.

(Note 4) The percentages of non-local students of non-UGC-funded undergraduate programmes refer to the percentages of intakes of non-local students as a share of the estimated intake places of relevant programmes. Estimated intake places are based on estimates made by institutions for planning purposes and may not necessarily represent the maximum approved intake quotas or admission targets.

In the 2022/23 to 2024/25 AY, the number of applications from non-local students for UGC-funded first-year-first-degree undergraduate programmes ranged between 70 000 and 80 000. The Education Bureau (EDB) does not maintain information on the number of applicants of other taught programmes.

(2), (3) and (4) The Government has temporarily exempted full-time non-local postgraduate students of local programmes from the restriction on taking up part-time jobs since November 2023, and has extended the temporary exemption arrangement to full-time non-local undergraduate students from November 2024 onwards. Since November 2023, the Immigration Department (ImmD) has issued "No Objection Letters" to nearly 150 000 eligible non-local students, who are allowed to take up part-time jobs under the temporary exemption arrangement without making applications. There is no restriction on the number of hours or the location of the part-time employment. The breakdown of the numbers of "No Objection Letters" issued by the ImmD under this arrangement by student category are tabulated below:

Student category	Number of "No Objection Letters" issued		
	2023 (November to December)	2024	2025 (as of May)
Non-local postgraduate students	51 161	54 987	16 946
Non-local undergraduate students	Not applicable#	24 037#	749

Total	51 161	79 024	17 695
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The Government has temporarily exempted full-time non-local undergraduate students from the restriction on taking up part-time jobs since November 1, 2024.

Non-local students benefitting from this arrangement are eligible to apply to stay in Hong Kong after graduation for development through the "Immigration Arrangement for Non-local Graduates". Allowing them to take up part-time jobs during their studies enables them to gain personal exposure and knowledge for working in Hong Kong, enhances their incentives to stay in Hong Kong for development after graduation, and helps attract more outside students to study in Hong Kong.

Under the temporary exemption arrangement, non-local students are not required to apply to the ImmD or notify their institutions for part-time employment. Therefore, the Government does not maintain statistics of non-local students taking up part-time jobs. According to the institutions, many non-local students have made use of the arrangement to take up various types of part-time jobs, including business support, retailing, and marketing, etc. The institutions generally agree that this arrangement helps attract non-local students to stay in Hong Kong for development after graduation, thereby expanding the city's potential talent pool.

The Government promotes this temporary exemption arrangement through various channels such as press releases, the ImmD's website and communications with employers, etc, and introduces the arrangement to chambers of commerce, employers and human resources practitioners through meetings with chambers of commerce, joint meetings of Human Resources Managers' Clubs, and other occasions. The Government also encourages relevant institutions to assist in enhancing on-campus promotion and providing appropriate support to eligible students. The Government will review the entire temporary exemption arrangement this year.

(5) In the light of the changes in the global higher education landscape, the EDB has promptly called on all universities in Hong Kong to introduce facilitation measures for affected students and scholars with a view to safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests, while attracting top talent in accordance with their diversified admissions and talent policies. The EDB is pleased to see that local universities are responding proactively and closely monitoring the situation, fully utilising the Government's facilitation initiatives that support the capacity expansion and quality enhancement of post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong.

The EDB will continue to keep a close eye on the development and accordingly consider support measures for them in a holistic approach so as to give full play to Hong Kong's role as an international post-secondary education hub. Apart from the recruitment measures of the institutions, the Government attracts more top talent to pursue their studies in Hong Kong

through a range of initiatives, including doubling the cap on non-local students in publicly funded post-secondary institutions to 40 per cent, increasing scholarship quotas, and gradually increasing the number of places under the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme. We remain committed to pursuing various policies and initiatives, fostering networks and partnerships at the national, regional, and international levels, and will continue to work collaboratively with stakeholders to promote the "Study in Hong Kong" brand. These efforts align with the national strategies to invigorate the country through science and education, cultivate high-calibre talent, and advance innovation and development, thereby contributing to meeting the needs of our nation.